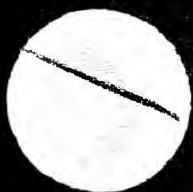


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CATHARINE COLE'S BOOK

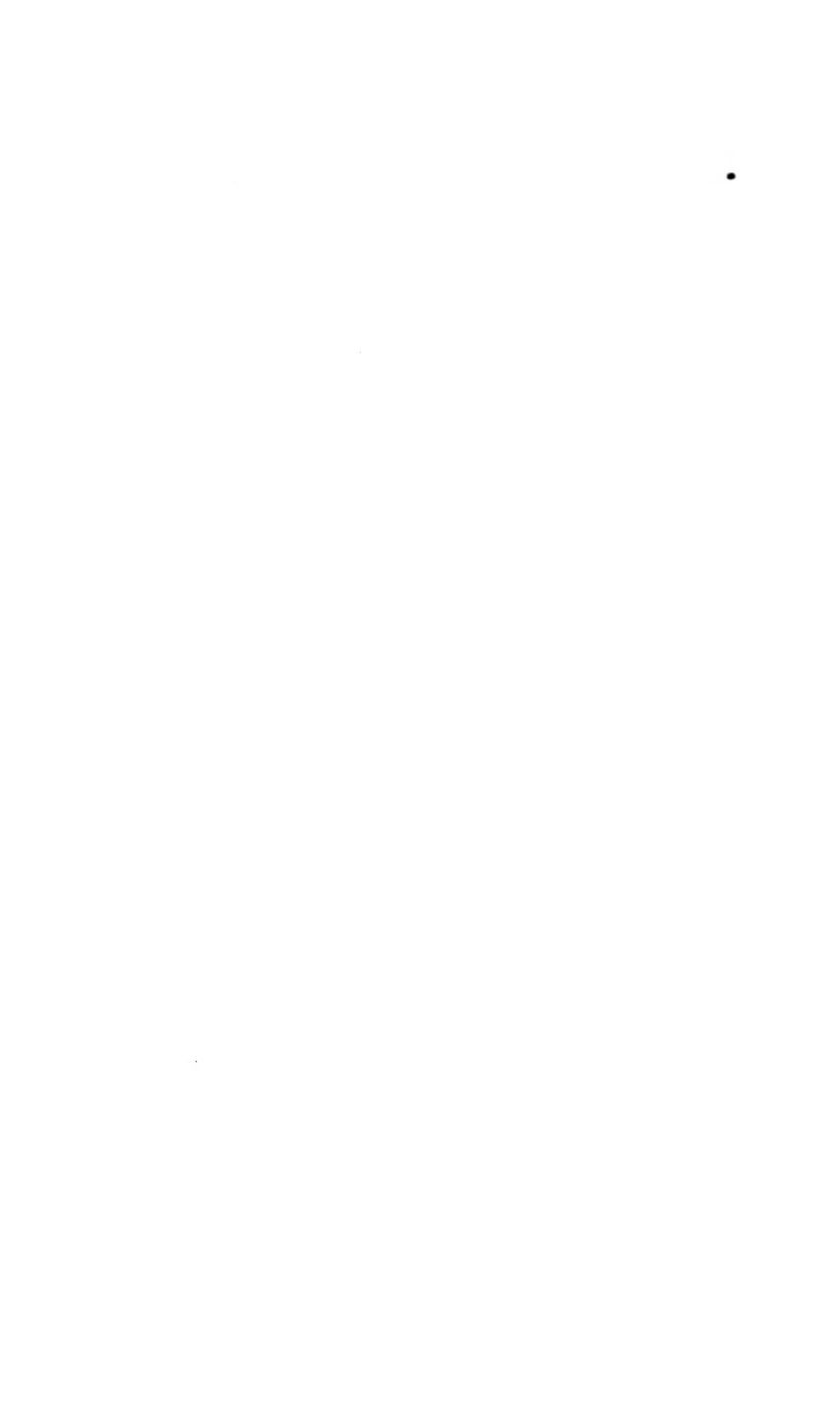


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CATHARINE COLE'S BOOK





Field, Catharine Cole's Book

CATHARINE COLE'S BOOK

WITH AN INTRODUCTION

BY

M. E. M. DAVIS



CHICAGO
A. C. McCLURG & COMPANY
1897

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St. Mary's
1895

INTRODUCTION.

It is a shady, old-fashioned street—a “green Cathedral aisle of untrimmed trees”—which leads from the wide city Boulevard to the “brown shell of a house” where these Letters were written. The busy world races back and forth along the Boulevard, with an ever-increasing clatter of progress and prosperity, of pride and parade. The Street dozes, tranquil and unchanging, beneath an over-arching sky which is as blue as the blue of a baby’s eyes. The fences that border it are over-hung by tangled masses of climbing roses, and alder, and trumpet-vines—and there the birds sing, year in and year out. Nigger-heads—yellow, rank and saucy—blossom in the ditches; grass grows along the brown wheel-ruts. The trees, with a fine disdain of man’s inventions, have thrust out their mossy roots and unsettled the birches of the old sidewalks, so that the passer-by must needs walk warily.

This is the Street.

The high-porched house where Catharine Cole

lives, has, for a decade and a half of years, seemed somehow to be the Other End of the street; though in truth the flower-set way wanders on until it loses itself in the swamp. So many pilgrims have trod the broken sidewalks, seeking the brave, strong, sympathetic woman whose power to help and to comfort was boundless! Youth, with elastic step and bounding heart, eager to clasp the Hand of the Magic Pen; Age, downcast and wretched, longing for the never-withheld word of cheer; hither they came—the poor, the rich, the happy, the despairing—pilgrims, as to a shrine, travelers, as to a Place of Rest.

In this cosy, time-worn old house Mrs. Field may be said to have really begun her life-work. The young journalist, a widowed mother, and a breadwinner, had indeed gained a foothold elsewhere, but here were written those earnest and sympathetic letters which have so stirred and encouraged her fellow working-women; here were wrought into shape exquisite sketches, stories, bits of rhyme, quaint silhouettes of life, wonderful descriptions of places and of people. From this “old brown house” she set forth upon her vagabond journeyings about the great world, carrying her readers with her, as Solomon, traveling from kingdom to kingdom through the air,

carried his vast household upon his bit of a magic carpet. And hither she always returned, drawn by the invisible chords of home-love, as by the magnet of Solomon himself.

This life-work of Martha Field (Catharine Cole) counted by years, has been comparatively brief. She was born in the picturesque old town of Lexington, Missouri. Her parents removed, in the early part of the sixties, to New Orleans. From her father, W. M. Smallwood, himself a talented journalist, she received her training for the profession which she adopted while still in the school-room. Her first newspaper work was done for the *New Orleans Republican*. The growing ambition of the young girl led her, later, to California, where she secured a position on one of the San Francisco journals. Here she was married, and here, within a short time, she was left a widow with an infant daughter. She quit-
ted at once the great city of the west, whose vivid warmth and color clung ever after to her pen, and returned to New Orleans to accept a position on the editorial staff of the *Times*. In 1881 she began that work for the *New Orleans Picayune*, which laid the real foundation for her constantly growing reputation, both as a journalist and as a literary worker of a high order. In an article written for the "Round Table of Lou-

isiana Authors." Mr. Bernard Shields says of her: "In literary work Catharine Cole is something of a dilettante; and whether the subject be of home, of art, of social life, of travel, or of politics, her pen is equally facile. Searching only for the truth, lauding what is good and denouncing wrong without fear or favor, her judgment is considered trustworthy and reliable. Perhaps one of the best things that can be said of her writings is that by them and in them she has always upheld women. Her pen is always busy in their behalf. . . . The remarkable progress of the cause of womanhood in the past ten years has astonished the world and made it better. Its advancement, particularly in Louisiana, is due in no small degree to the work of Catharine Cole. . . . She has never lost an opportunity to wield her pen in behalf of her state; and no southern writer has done more to make known its resources and to advance the interests of its people. . . . To the influence of her pen and brain New Orleans owes its Training School for Nurses, its Woman's Exchange, and its Kindergartens. She is said to know as much about the material resources of Louisiana as any one in the state. On foot, in a buggy, or by canoe, she has traveled over every inch of its territorial limits, sending back

to the journal she represents the most truthful and realistic reports of her travels. . . . She knows Europe by heart. . . . Her extensive travels, both abroad and in this country, have added largely to her rich fund of information, and her ramblings into the remotest corners of the world, . . . have given her a knowledge of men and things that strengthens her writings with assurance and masculine boldness; while her sensitive tenderness and sympathy with human suffering lend the charm of woman's pen that appeals to the heart."

The same writer describes Mrs. Field personally as a "rather slightly built woman with light brown hair, grayish blue eyes, topping a large nose and mouth, a soft, pleasant voice, and an unassuming quiet demeanor."

In 1894 Catharine Cole became a member of the editorial staff of the New Orleans *Times-Democrat*. Her letters to that journal—from Switzerland, from England, from aboard ship in tropical seas—have sustained her brilliant reputation.

But a singular pathos now attaches to the sketches written from the "brown shell of a house" at the Other End of the Street. For the hand that has "knitted into the russet-colored

fabric" of so many lives, the "golden threads of love and hope" has become well-nigh helpless. The spirit which has so faithfully wrought for the good of others is strong and ardent still; the brain is clear and keen, but the flesh, in the grasp of pain, is weak, and the heart flutters wearily in a panting breast.

Several years have passed since Catharine Cole was first stricken by a mortal malady which has gradually sapped her abundant strength and left her a hopeless invalid. Bravely, calmly, quietly, staring death in the face, she has continued to write; those who know her know also that not until the pen drops forever from her nerveless fingers will she cease to speak her message of hope and cheer to the world.

This volume made up from her work, has been prepared in the hope and with the desire that it may aid in lifting the burden—a burden, alas, of poverty—which lies upon this brave and tender soul.

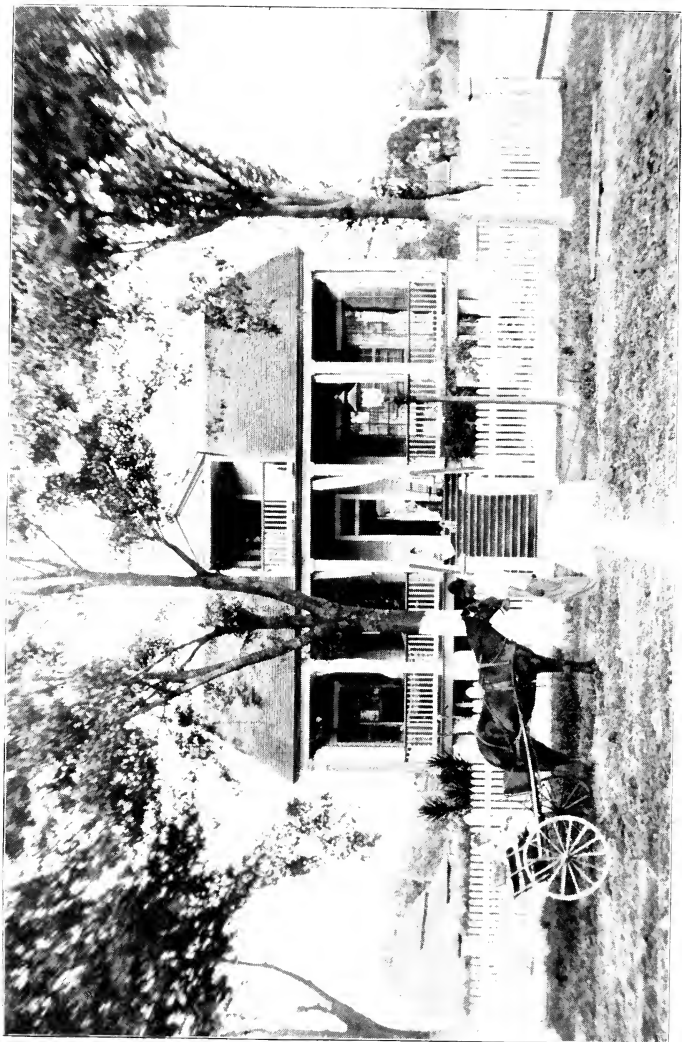
It is sent forth confidently to the many who have known her face to face; and to the many more who have never seen her, but who have been strengthened and helped by her wide-reaching influence.

M. E. M. DAVIS.

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OVER THE HILLTOPS.

It is an epoch in life wherein we discover, as by an inspiration, the beauty or the grandeur or the goodness of any work or any thing. These flashlight revelations tearing across the sky of our night are our divine moments—our winged moments. They come to us in successive stages and leave us finer, larger, wiser, better. They are the milestones along our real life—the indicators, pointing heartward, of our real growth. To have at any time this sudden sense of knowledge, to be Columbus to something of God's or man's creating, is everything. A door once opened, giving us a look into another room hitherto locked against us, giving us a look into a garden where undreamed-of roses bloom, can never be truly closed for us again. We have seen into the beyond, and we know. We can never unknow a thing.

A little child sits in the sun playing, the winds blow sweet about her, and their Juney breath caresses her fair aureoled head. Her vibrant little voice thrills and buzzes somnolently like the pleasant whirr of a humming bird's wings. Suddenly there floats in at the open window, riding a sunbeam down as if it were a

summer wave, a little silken, silvery-masted craft put afloat by some tethered plant. It is a thistle-down swinging on the wind, silver-sheathed, stealthy, with a touch too fine to be tangible on the ruder fabric of our flesh. As it floats airily through space it falls across the wonder of the child's eyes. She gazes at it, with a mysterious rush of recognition and intuition fluttering her leashed and leaping soul. To her this is no common thistle-down, but a fairy, a very Princess Fairy, dumb, roaming, and beautiful. Its coming was the needed but natural confirmation of the faith that is orthodox in Lilliput. Now all her beautiful angels of belief become real. All Wonderland is her empire, and sitting in the radiance of the day and of her joy, she reigns a queen with the shaft of a sunbeam for her scepter.

And thus her growth begins. A door has been opened and she has seen the blooming roses in the garden beyond; a hillock has been mounted and she has glimpsed the wondrous peaks of the far-off hills. It will still be growth for her when she realizes the beautiful fact that the floating thistle-down, new to her, is the old age of a lovely plant, and again she will feel the uplift that comes of acquirement, the joy of conquest, the sweetness of comprehending things and of being in sympathy with something that is beautiful.

There are some of us, learning to spell out the language of nature, who may remember the absolute joy that possessed us when first we sensed the majesty and the growing of trees, the patient

unfurling of the young leaf banners, the putting forth of new twigs, the renewal of life, the mighty effort to attain symmetry and the far-off beckoning skies, the fine adjustment within the environment of earth and sky. No one forgets the first conception of an idea. Then is a mighty moment that contains for us the annunciation of some great fact in nature or in life.

I remember once standing on the sloping sward of a beautiful estate in Ireland and looking at the ripple of a pebbled river and the eternal calm of the blue sky through a network of delicately traced marble columns that knit overhead in the multitudinous beauty of arches of solid masonry. It was the ruined, crumbling remembrance of an old Franciscan abbey. A tangle of purple-fruited brambles filled the shady spaces of the cool cloisters; an Irish ivy twisted itself in the slender columns; the deep brittle blue luminosity of a June sky bending over the fairest country in the world was picked out by the flawless perfection of those beautiful arches. It came on me with the lightning flash that an arch of masonry is the most perfect work of man's hand. It is cathedral and Pantheon, capital and Coliseum. You may look at things half a lifetime and not see them at all; but on the day you realize their beauty, their fitness and proportion, their use, then they become yours. Gape and gawk through a cathedral, wondering at its height and space; when you feel the spirit of its architecture, then it is your sanctuary. When you realize the

growing trees, then the forest is your temple, with the sky for its dome. Then indeed, Westminster may become an epic, and that old Franciscan abbey a religion.

Some heathens have had the belief that the sky was the face of a god. This is beautiful enough even for us of to-day, who are still heathens to many of the beauties of God's worlds. You may have gone on for years walking down the May mornings, glad, alert, with the spring-time of health and strength leaping in your heels and heart, and tugging at your muscles, but still giving no real thought to anything of nature about you, until, as in a flash, your soul, like a dove, seemed to put forth white wings and cleave the blue. How was it you had missed being conscious of it for so long—coming and going and never until now comprehending with this new, sudden, subtle sympathy the eternal calm and tenderness of the sky? It bends over like the Madonna. You might pray to it; your loosed soul might swim in it. Its beauty elates you and fills your senses, and you feel to have gained something. The world is suddenly grown fairer—you own more of it. Are you tired? Here is something to rest you. Is earth dull? Look up. Would your eyes grovel on something at your feet? Look up. It is the countenance of God in the infinite glory of the sky that meets your gaze and answers your plaint with a benediction.

A stage of growth is when we discover some

God-like beauty, some tender human sweetness in the heart of a friend. The negro washer-woman toiling at her tubs may give you this thrill of discovery. You find she has something great in her — something that you may lack — a patient endurance of poverty, say; a fine persistence to wash her clothes white as snow. She is a hero at her trade, and when you discover or realize the hero-heart of her it ought to make you better at your trade. Every time you discover or sense some beauty in life, you burst a bond that holds you to earth. You are that much freer to be fine. You rule. When you find something beautiful in your own trade, you are growing. Your trade may be scrubbing, or driving a cart, or studying a school-girl's books, or mending a gown; but when you take joy in working your best — in seeing some other made happy because you are doing your best — then you may hold up your head and walk the earth like a goddess.

A girl at home goes on thoughtlessly accepting the services of her mother. She sees the mother mending, and tending the home fires, sees her always willing and never wearied, always sinking self, and it seems all right and natural. There is no hint of the missed joys from her patient life, no plaint of the dull evenings at home, no whispered regret for the music and the books, the flowers and the companionship that are denied her. But some day, often too late, there comes to the daughter the divine moment of

cognizance. The pathetic patience, the mute endurance, the infinite tenderness, the dumb self-abnegation, the long self-sacrifice, the immolated saint of motherhood, take shape like a figure on the bleak height of Calvary. First Christ, and then a mother! The moment and the passion of a revelation like this hurts, but it leaves you kinder, tenderer, sweeter.

It makes no difference where you are placed in life, you are intended to look up and to grow, to widen and radiate. The warrior in you must fight; the hero in you must protect and save. May be there is just a carpenter in you, or a seamstress, or a patient knitter by a home fire, but the beauty is there all the same. You must grow to the sun, to the stars, to the far-off skies. To do and to be, you have no need to concern yourself about others, to take part in your neighbor's squabblings. Think of yourself. The individual "you" is of the first account, and that must be so fine and so strong, so distinct, and in such sharp outline that you will be a cameo cut in the beautiful amber of life. The true man or woman cannot be gnat-bitten by any one's example or the fear of any one's comment or sneer. It is a puny soul that totters and is afraid to stand alone and send out its own cry. You bare yourself not to the world but to God. You must show him your heart, not its husk. How much truth is there in you? What do you feel when you read Shakespeare? When you meet a hero? When you see anguish or sorrow or pain hurrying to

some neighbor of yours? When the poem touches your heart it touches the poet in you; when the actor makes you spring in the air and cry hurrah, it is because he has touched that genius in you.

A country boy going to school came crying to me one day that all his books were old to him. "When I read them, I find I know them," he said. It was the meeting of emperors. He was royal to all great truths. Until we meet them so, they are not truths for us. I am dumb for you unless you know you might have said this that I say. I am dead for you unless you might feel the thrill of my sorrow or my passion.

In a remote country village, who has not been touched by the spectacle of life? You come there from the big city that is an artery of the world, and you find out in the village what little things go to make up life. The people are like invalids who pass life sitting by a window and are constrained to amuse themselves with little things. Which woman rode in which buggy; how this one has made over her perennial gown; who shook hands with the visitor and who did not; the making of preserves; the weights of new babies. But this is not the place to sneer; nay, this is the place to learn how large is the world, what room there is to grow, what need there is to set your hopes and aims on the higher things.

Sometimes in the big city you meet a woman who is bound up in herself. It is not a compact between herself and God. She owns no Jacob's ladder traversed by the beautiful angels of good

deeds, but she lives, works, thinks only for her own body, her own vanity, her own comfort. All the world is incidental to her affairs, to the satisfaction of her vanity. When she goes to bed at night she has not done one single act for the happiness of another. She has no plans to sweeten life for others. She would not pass the fare of an old man in the street car, nor think of denying herself a plume on her bonnet to succor a starving family. What does she live for—pinioned to pride and self-conceit, tethered to the earth, meeting no royal ones, stirred by no fine sentiments? I would not have you change places with such a one if she dwelt in a castle of Castile. Never be ashamed of shedding a tear; never be ashamed of jumping out of yourself into the armor of a knight; never be ashamed to be seen lifting a beggar over the street; never despair of meeting an emperor.

Some people are good by rule because they cannot get along in decent society otherwise. Some go to church simply because it is Sunday. You can't keep that up. You find yourself out, and you know that God has found you out. But you must go to church or to the temple of the woods to find out if the germ of religion is in you. Do you thrill at the singing, at the dome, at the solemn cry of the litany; does some peace come into you and make tranquil your hour? Then it is in you to grow. You may not grow dogmas, but you will grow starward and skyward.

Sum up your day. What did you do in it;

does it leave ashes in your teeth, or the fragrance of violets? You can not afford to waste life on its curl papers, to dawdle along talking of puddings and preserves. What is the book I read to me unless it teaches me something—how to feel, how to smile, how to weep? I must be sure a thing holds nothing good for me and then I must cast it aside. I cannot waste time on nothing. I must live, must be amused, must see the world, must be made better. I cannot waste life, love, energy, ambition, on the trivial soul, the barren soil, the soulless form. Life is precious when it makes us laugh, weep, moan, act, cry, hurrah; not when it permits us to dream in a sort of senseless calm. Let me sail, let me be seasick, let me be wrecked, let me have this turmoil of living; how can the rest and security of the Rock of Ages be sweet to me, how shall I clasp it, unless I have come out of the tempest?

You must not be afraid of anything save the useless. A useless woman, making no one the finer for her being, giving no one a zest for companionship of her, sweetening the soul of no one, is like a thing made of ashes. When the true one comes along she will crumble as an old dead body might, feeling for the first time in a thousand years the live air. I have often seen a woman crumble under this stress. In the council, in the association, in the home gathering, what she is and why she is there is plain to all eyes.

Sometimes a woman will have nothing to do with a good work unless she can be president of

it. If it makes any difference to you where you sit, be careful; you are turning to ashes, and the draft from the outer world will blow you away. Do n't think about yourself, think about the sky; let all the sweet sap and juices of your deep humanity leap upward to it. When I come into the council of women who are talking and working for the good of others, does it make any difference whether my voice is heard? I can keep still and, if I am the finest nature there, I can still dominate that meeting. Do I care who speaks; who is leader? To follow is just as fine; to keep silent is just as grand. Why do you go to your club? Is it to laud yourself; is it to gorge yourself on the fat of leadership; is it to advertise yourself as good as your neighbor? Then you are no worthy member. The pettiness of you makes you an outlaw. Cleaner, finer souls ought to blackball you. Search yourself and find out why you do a thing, not why your neighbor does it.

But if you go there for growth, if you forget yourself in the work, then, though you sit on a footstool in the dingiest corner, you are a queen, and the scepter of your influence is all magical and fine.

Some women never get tired of talking about themselves; they never get enough praise. This is dangerous and dwarfing. To your child, to your mother, to your husband, you may talk "I." To your God you may talk nothing else. But this is all. To grow finely is to forget self.

In the heat and passion of battle the soldier forgets that the enemy's bullet may pierce his heart. He becomes a hero because the bonds that hold him to earth are snapped asunder. He becomes great because he forgets everything in the passion of winning. His arm is the instrument. It is only when you are carried out of yourself that you really advance in a path that you cannot retrace. To make some one else content with life, to make the way easier for some one else, to cause a child to smile, to rest an old woman of her burden, to right a wrong, to tell a fine truth, to give a flower, to ease an ailing one, these are the ways of growth. This is the way to make life beautiful. It is not necessary to jump a continent or cross an ocean. Often you need not span a gutter. Life and being and doing begin at home. You can't grow from the outward in. You expand like the breath of incense in a cathedral, like the perfume of a flower in a garden. You must unfold petal by petal until your sweetness permeates all space.

And now let us hurry onward. Surely over this hill-top we shall see the tent of home. Let us climb on, patient hearts. Over this nearer hilltop we see only another higher still, and beyond that another higher still, white with eternal snows. But going on, we train our lungs to breathe a thinner air, and upon us shines the reflected whiteness of the snows. Some day, all at once, like a sunrise in the Alps, the beauty of this climbing seizes on us. We are glad to be

mountaineers and to shout at each other from the hilltops. And then it is no longer strife.* The soul grows like an Easter lily. The heartache is over. The skies only — the far-off skies — are above you. You lift your soul, and on this mountain height of fine endeavor, with roughened hands and wearied heart, you still may cry, “I have won!”

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